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ABSTRACT

This report presents the findings from a study of 57 women's centers at community colleges across the country. In spite of the diversity of the origins and evolution of campus-based women's centers, the evidence indicates that most centers today provide educational support services and advocacy for campus women, many of whom are single parents. The role and scope of the centers have changed in various ways. Some report a shift from a feminist orientation to one that emphasizes "hard skills" that aid in employability and self-sufficiency while others have turned to issues related to general college curricula. The apparent contradiction in focus is possibly due to the variance in the needs and interests of the different segments of the target population. It may also confirm the previous research that suggests that women's centers address a wide range of populations, needs and concerns. Although community college programs fare better than university-based women's centers because of federally funded programs that target the special populations the host institutions serve, centers still operate with inadequate and temporary funding bases, often having to justify their existence by generating self-supporting funds. Reduction of federal funds may jeopardize existing equity programs and programs for special populations funded by this source. Most women's centers place relatively little emphasis on their role as advocates of women's issues. (Contains 29 references.) (JA)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE WOMEN'S CENTERS: A QUESTION OF SURVIVAL

Mary Helen Vera and Ruth Burgos-Sasscer

Campus-based women's centers have played a critical role in the empowerment of women for almost thirty years. They not only have opened doors for women to access education, but they have provided the support needed for their success. In particular, community college women's centers, with their strong track record of serving diverse special needs populations, continue to play a unique role in significantly impacting the lives of countless women. Given the magnitude and importance of their role, it is disconcerting to note that there is a wide gap in the knowledge and research base relative to women's centers at these institutions.

Ample information about the characteristics and needs of women returning to colleges and universities is available (Rice and Meyer, 1989; Swift, et.al.,1987). What is lacking is adequate information about the services and programs which are designed to assist reentry women (Girard, 1977; Calkins, 1993). Some data exists about women's centers at the four year college and university level, but significantly less is available about community college women's centers (Title and Denker, 1980). In order for community colleges to continue to satisfactorily

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address the needs of their women students, it is imperative that programs designed to assist them be studied.

This paper will explore the historical development of women's centers, including a review of research studies conducted to date. While the central focus of the chapter will be on women's centers at community colleges, information on four year college and university-based women's centers will also be presented. In addition, although the authors acknowledge the "ad hoc" nature of programs and services for women at some institutions, the discussion in this chapter will be limited to administratively organized campus-based women's centers.

Also included in this discussion are the results of a national survey of campus-based community college women's centers conducted by the authors. The primary goal of this survey was to determine the current status of community college women's centers. Among the questions asked were: How are these centers organized? What needs are they meeting? What populations are they serving? How are they funded? Finally, what challenges are women's centers currently experiencing and how do they perceive their futures?

CAMPUS-BASED WOMEN'S CENTERS: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

In order to understand the nature of today's campus-based women's centers, it is helpful to examine where and how they

began. It is important to note at this juncture, however, that no clear written record of the evolution of women's centers exists (Brooks, 1988).

Services for women students that most closely approximate those provided by women's centers today originated about 30 years ago in four year colleges and universities and were labeled continuing education programs for women (Title and Denker, 1980). The women's movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s spurred the influx of women to college campuses. The majority of these women were white, middle class, older than the traditional college student, were likely to possess a Bachelor's Degree and to have delayed their career for marriage and children (Title and Denker, 1980). Many were undergoing transitions and were exploring personal as well as career options (Calkins, 1993). Institutions responded by initially offering workshops, introductory courses and support groups. Eventually women's centers were established to meet the special education needs of this growing population (Mulligan, 1973).

The decades of the 1970s and 1980s continued to see an increase in the numbers of women returning to college. By the 1980s, women outnumbered men on college campuses, further justifying the need for providing special services to women (Calkins, 1993). This increase in numbers, however, was accompanied by a shift in the profile of the target population

that now included single parents, minority and low income women, and displaced homemakers. Thus, university-based women's centers began "to move beyond the original mission of helping women of means to obtain higher education for enrichment and professional training to empowering groups of disadvantaged women" (Rice and Meyers, 1989, p. 554). These programs are now known as reentry programs (Bratowski, 1989).

In the community college sector, programs specifically designed to recruit women students began to appear in the early to mid-1970s. Programs for special populations, including single parents, minority and disadvantaged women and women in non-traditional careers soon followed. Counseling activities are central components of all of these programs (Title and Denker, 1980).

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Evidence indicates many higher education institutions fund the establishment of women's centers, but do not provide adequate continued financial support to sustain them (Stineman, 1984). University-based women's centers receive the least financial support from their institutions (Rice & Meyer, 1989). Community college programs fare somewhat better because of federally funded programs that target the special populations the host institutions serve.

Community colleges have been the primary recipients of funds targeted for special populations. The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Acts of 1984 and 1990 provided funding for programs and services to displaced homemakers, single parents, single pregnant women and other disadvantaged students in higher education. In addition to Carl Perkins federal funding, monies for similar programs came from a variety of sources, including the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and the Departments of Education and Labor (Rice and Meyer, 1988). Although the funding is not exclusively for women, most of the students meeting the criteria are women (Evans, 1993) so many community colleges administer these federal funds through existing women's centers. Those without women's centers have had to create special units for this purpose.

PRIOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN'S CENTERS

Assessing the status of women's programs and services is not an easy task. The varying definitions used for women's centers makes it difficult to estimate the actual number of programs and services offered (Title and Denker, 1980) and the absence of a national organizing agent precludes the compilation of uniform data (Clevinger, 1987). In addition, the process of reviewing the limited research is complicated by constraints in locating materials. Much of what has been studied to this point exists in unpublished doctoral dissertations and papers which are not

easily accessed. Even so, over the years, attempts made to study women's programs and services on college and university campuses have provided important insight into the evolution of the role and scope of these programs.

In 1969, a national survey identified 63 campus-based women's centers, most of which primarily offered counseling programs for mature women (Title and Denker, 1980). Five years later, in 1974, Bertleson conducted a survey (as cited in Sweeney, 1978) identifying 215 women's centers across the United States. In this study, the target populations of women's centers were found to be more diverse than those of other campus services. Centers were also found to provide "direct services to supplant biased services" (Sweeney, 1978, p.1) when direct services to students were not provided elsewhere on campus. Bertleson's study also found forty-one (41%) percent of these centers were dependent on temporary funding, including grants and donations.

Sweeney (1978) also reported the results of a 1976 needs survey conducted by the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) Project of the Everywomen's Center at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Three hundred and forty-eight centers were identified in this study. Interestingly, most of these centers were found to be in positions which allow them to be concerned with all aspects of the institution and not focused on

women's issues alone. Sweeney concluded that this "cross-departmental perspective" may be viewed as an advantage in that it allows centers to take on advocacy and program creation opportunities as they arise across the institution. However, it may also contributes to center marginality as a result of "problematic internal organizational responses" such as inadequate budgets and lack of substantive administrative support (Sweeney, 1978, p.13).

The advantages and disadvantages of a cross-departmental approach to women's centers have been discussed by other researchers (Brooks, 1988; Girard, 1977). In a special edition of Initiatives (1988) which focused on campus women's centers, several authors stressed women's issues should not be the exclusive concern of the campus-based women's centers. The editor of Initiatives reinforced this opinion when she commented that directors of women's centers should take every opportunity to communicate with other female administrators and staff because this is "ultimately one of the most effective ways to avoid the evils of ghettoization" (p. 2).

One of the few studies on women's centers at community colleges was conducted in 1977 by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges. Three hundred community colleges were found to have "some type" of women's center (Eliason, 1977). This study indicated the most frequently utilized services

provided by community college centers were the traditional ones of "group counseling and support services such as testing, peer tutoring and referrals to human services agencies" (p. 20). As was the case with the institutions Sweeney studied, the greatest problem these centers faced was inadequate funding.

One of the most recent studies examined 124 community college and university-based women's centers (Clevenger, 1987). The purpose of this study was to determine the characteristics of campus-based women's centers. Clevenger found two types of campus-based centers: those administered by the institution and supported financially by it, and those run by students and funded by student activity fees. In addition, most of the 124 women's centers she studied were located at research and doctorate-granting universities and at community colleges with enrollments of more than 10,000 students. Programs for displaced homemakers, reentry programs and programs for single parents were more likely to be found at the community college. The centers were also found to be diverse in their mission, funding, organization and structure, underscoring the tendency for women's centers (which were established independently) to address their founders' concerns rather than a national or uniform agenda. Once again, funding was listed as a primary constraint in expanding current levels of service and planning for the future.

Vera (1995) conducted an informal telephone survey of 13 women's centers to identify salient issues regarding the organization of women's centers that might be useful to institutions planning to establish new centers. Vera confirmed most existing women's centers offer diverse but traditional services such as counseling workshops, referrals and publications. A few, however, offer multicultural programs. The Everywomen's Center at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, for example, has bilingual staff to provide counseling assistance to Asian students, their predominant minority population.

In terms of organization, the centers surveyed by Vera varied in size and reporting structure. The average center employs four individuals full-time, but all of them supplement their numbers with part-time staff. Most of the centers use advisory councils or boards for policy formation and fund-raising.

In spite of the diversity of the origins, role and scope, and evolution of campus-based women's centers, the evidence indicates that most centers provide educational support services and advocacy for campus women, especially students. After a broad-based overview of women's centers, Brooks (1988) concluded that a common element in the primary goals of almost all centers is "advocacy for women on campus and making both the institution

and individual women aware of the changing status of women" (p.19).

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY OF CURRENT SURVEY

In order to determine the current status of women's centers, we conducted a survey of community college women's centers with programs designed to recruit and support women students in degree credit enrollment. The survey consisted of twenty multiple choice questions in addition to questions used to obtain demographic information, such as the geographic location and size (as measured by the number of enrolled students) of the institution and the administrative reporting structure. As no comprehensive mailing list for women's centers exists, the mailing list for the survey was compiled from various sources including the National Association of Women's Centers, the American Association of Community College Women Model Programs the American Association of Community College Membership Directory, the Women's Information Directory and the Everywomen's Guide to College and Universities. From these sources, 134 community colleges were identified and asked to complete the survey. Only college administratively run centers were considered due to the transitory nature of student-run centers.

Seventy responses were received (52% response rate). Of this number, six reported they no longer had a women's center and

six that they never had a women's center. Two responses were from student-run centers and were excluded. Fifty-seven usable responses were analyzed to determine changes from center inception to the present in various categories including funding, types of programs and activities offered, populations and discernible changes in target populations being served. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the data.

SURVEY RESULTS

Location and Structure

Demographically, the largest (45%) number of respondents are located in the Western geographic region; 23% are located in the Southern region and 16% each are located in the North Atlantic and Midwest regions of the country.

The largest percentage of women's centers (30%) appear to be located in institutions with student populations of 5,000 to 9,999; 23% are located in institutions with populations between 10,000-19,999 and 11% each are in institutions with under 2,500 or over 30,000 students.

In terms of administrative structure, half of the institutions with women's centers responding to this survey are administratively located in Student Affairs with only 14% located in Academic Affairs. This is not surprising since women's centers have traditionally been located in student services

(Wetzel, 1988). A small percentage of women's centers are located in Continuing Education and Vocational Education departments.

Historically, women's centers had their greatest growth in the 1970's (Wetzel, 1988). A majority of the centers in this survey (59%) were well established, having been in existence for 15 to 25 years. Forty percent (40%) were founded in the 1980's. However, only seven of the centers were founded after 1989, indicating a possible downward trend in the establishment of centers in recent years.

The majority (53%) of centers in the survey employ two to five full-time paid employees. However, a large percentage function with only one paid full-time staff member (40%). Larger centers with five or more full-time workers constitute six percent (6%) of the respondents.

As with university-based women's centers, these centers rely heavily on part-time workers, with 64% employing one to three part-time workers, and 28% employing four or more part-time workers to supplement their staff. Only seven percent (7%) of the centers operate exclusively with full-time employees. A majority (65%) rely on one to four volunteers. Student workers are an important part of staffing, with over fifty percent (50%) of centers employing up to two student workers.

Survey data were analyzed and grouped into five major categories.

They were;

1) funding patterns and institutional support; 2) types of programs provided; 3) number and type of client/participants served; 4) changes in client/participant profile since inception; and 5) changes in the role and scope of women's centers since inception.

Funding Patterns and Institutional Support

Questions on funding explored changes and trends from initial to present budget allocations and sources of revenue. An additional area of questioning focused on the extent of federal versus institutional funding including the use of federal funds in the establishment of centers.

Initial center budgets ranged from $0 to $287,000. The median initial budget was $24,000. Center budgets for 1994-95 ranged from $300 to over $455,000 with the median budget at $33,000. Although comparison of initial to current median budgets does not appear to reflect much growth, it is interesting to note the increase in the number of centers with budgets over $100,000. Sixteen percent (16%) of centers reported an initial budget of $100,000 or more while 41% of current budgets are over $100,000.

Survey responses indicate federal funding played a significant role in the initial establishment of fifty-seven percent (57%) of centers surveyed. Further analysis of this question was limited, however, by inadequate data. Over half of the respondents were not able to report the exact amount of their original budgets. Some centers mentioned they have not been with the center since its establishment and apparently do not have access to this information.

Federal funding continues to play a dominant role in these centers' budgets. An overwhelming majority of centers (75%) reported that federal funds constitute at least half of their 1994-95 budget. Seven centers reported they are 100% reliant on federal funds. Nine centers receive 75% of their funding through this source. Only twenty-three percent (23%) of the centers report they are ***not*** receiving these funds. While there is no doubt these funds provide centers with a larger funding base, some respondents commented on the problems caused by the restrictions imposed by these funds. One respondent stated that, "Excellent grant funded projects are not maintained after one or two years and the constant shifts in restrictions make it difficult to provide stable programs".

While institutional and federal funding constitute the primary sources of funding, centers also reported receiving other sources of revenue, including grant or foundation support,

financial support from individual donors, student activity fees and fund-raising revenues. These sources, however, constitute a small percentage of the entire budget.

Closely related to funding is the topic of institutional support. Forty-eight percent (48%) of respondents indicated their college administrators were very supportive of their center. Forty-one percent (41%) indicated moderate support; eleven (11%) indicated their administrators were neutral or nonsupportive. However, some respondents differentiated between supportive attitudes and actual financial support. For example, a respondent who indicated administrators are moderately supportive went on to state, "They are not supportive with budget or space. However, whenever people from other colleges visit they usually bring them to visit because it has model programs and is unique." Another stated that they receive administrative support, "As long as no local funds are required for program support."

Some centers reported having to "pay their own way", i.e., obtain their own monies for program operation through grantwriting. As one stated, "The institutional attitude is, `If you've got the money, honey, we've got the space.' We get our own funding by writing the grants, the college provides us the space." Even centers who mentioned very supportive

administrators reported that this support was not uniform throughout the administration.

Centers also mentioned continually justifying their existence. One respondent asked for a copy of the results of this survey to assist her in arguing her "case" to administrators for continuation of the "unique services" her program provides.

Programs and Services

Overwhelmingly, the most frequent support service that is being provided by centers is childcare referrals. For many women returning to college, in particular single parents and low income women, affordable childcare presents a formidable challenge. In a study on the relationship between campus-based childcare to the enrollment and persistence of community college students, Fadale and Winter (1991) concluded that "campus-based childcare availability was not only necessary for initial consideration of enrollment, but also contributed strongly to continued achievement or academic success" (p.122). In this study, ninety percent (90%) of survey respondents are providing this service.

Counseling, including academic, career and personal counseling, constitute the second most frequent service being provided (88%), reflecting the important role this service

continues to play in community college women's centers. Other services provided include registration assistance (81%); lecture/discussion groups (79%); orientation and support groups (77%); financial aid advisement (74%); workshops/personal development classes (67%); and textbook/equipment assistance (68%). Transportation, tuition and employment assistance are also provided by some centers.

Community college women's centers have been noted for developing and implementing programs to promote nontraditional careers for women (Rice and Meyer, 1989). This survey confirmed the importance community colleges place on equity programs. The vast majority of centers (67%) indicated they are providing these services. The range of equity services varies from counseling activities to workshops and seminars that focus on the promotion of non-traditional careers.

It should be noted that many of the programs and services offered by centers are available when grant monies are allocated for these purposes. As a result, services are not be always offered on a consistent basis.

Number of Participants and Profile

Respondents were asked to provide the total number of individuals served during the 1993-94 academic year. The largest percentage of centers (46%) served under 500 with an additional 18% providing services to between 500 and 1,000 individuals. A

few centers reported serving over 5,000 individuals. For example, Bellevue Community College Women's Resource Center in Bellevue, Washington, reported serving over 6,000 clients. Most centers reported an increase in the numbers they are serving since the program was established.

Although community college women's centers have been noted for serving more ethnically diverse groups than four-year college or university women's centers (Title and Denker, 1980), primarily, the majority of centers responding to this survey are serving white women. Forty-two percent (42%) of centers serve less than 10% minority populations. However, it should be pointed out that while it appears the percentage of minority women served is small, these numbers must be evaluated relative to the minority population for the entire community which the center serves. For example, the Life Skills/Women's Program in Spokane, Washington, provides services to an 11% minority population but the minority population for the city at large is only 6.5%.

Many centers do stress minority participation. Thirty-eight percent (38%) serve from 40% to 98% minority students. The predominant minority groups served are Afro-American women (48%) and Hispanic women (34%). The target group most frequently served is single parents (35%) followed by reentry women (30%).

Displaced homemakers are served less frequently (18%). Only 5% of women served are non-students.

Changes in Participant Profile

Questions in this category were directed at exploring changes in the profile of center target populations. Thirty-five percent (35%) of respondents reported the type of student they are serving has changed since the center was established. The most dramatic change is the shift from serving middle-class white women to serving low income or economically disadvantaged minority women, including single parents. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of centers have observed an increase in the number of single parents. The focus on providing childcare referrals as a primary service is reflective of the increase in these populations.

Another change is the shift from serving exclusively women to serving both women and men. Sixty percent (60%) of respondents reported an increase in the number of male participants. Centers continue to focus on reentry and other non-traditional students, but this focus has been broadened to include both men and women. Many of the men being served are dislocated workers and single parents.

Changes in Role and Scope

Almost half (49%) of the centers reported a change in the focus of their programming. These changes can be grouped into

two broad areas. The first is a shift from "soft skills" training such as assertiveness training (referred to by one respondent as "hand holding") to a focus on "survival" and self-sufficiency. As stated by one respondent, "feminism has gone out of our center". In its place is a focus on promoting employability skills that will lead to economic self-sufficiency and empowerment. One respondent put it this way: "Women in greater numbers are left with no training for jobs and no support from their former spouse. Public assistance is getting harder to obtain, so training for self-sufficiency is vital". This viewpoint is reflected in many of the center's mission statements. Tyler Junior College in Tyler, Texas, is one example: "To provide supportive programs which enable individuals with special needs to acquire the training necessary to competitively enter the job market and become productive, self-sufficient citizens." Most center mission statements maintain an emphasis on "self-sufficiency" or "empowerment."

In what appears to be an apparent contradiction, the second programming change is a shift from job training to an emphasis on academics or the general college curricula. This appears to be related to a push by some centers to serve a retention function. It is unclear why this is occurring, although one could speculate that the educational needs of these students is increasing.

The Face of the Future

Challenges

Respondents were asked to identify the greatest challenge facing their program in the next five years. Not surprisingly, given the reliance of many centers on federal funding, respondents rated insufficient funding as their biggest challenge. Some centers emphasized that they are ***currently*** operating with inadequate funding. As an example of this dilemma, one respondent noted, "Due to funding reduction it will leave me without secretarial support to operate a very demanding program." Another mentioned running out of operating funds for support services by the middle of the current budget year.

In addition to present concerns about funding, many centers mentioned a perceived threat to ***future*** operating budgets due to cuts in federal (Carl Perkins) funding. One respondent echoed the feeling of others when she mentioned being "Very uncertain of the future of Carl Perkins grant funds." The feeling of uncertainty is exemplified by the following astute observation from one respondent: "We all know the end [of federal funding] is near and that institutions may have to take a different approach if they want to keep women's programs."

Other challenges mentioned by centers include the current attitudes of indifference or apathy towards women's issues, as reflected in the national political agenda regarding welfare reform and affirmative action.

Primary Role

Respondents were also asked what they consider the primary role of community college women's centers will be in the next five years. Most centers (40%) believe the primary role will be to provide programs and activities targeted for women. Although advocacy of women's issues was rated second in importance, only 18% of respondents mentioned this.

Continued need for Women's Centers

Overwhelmingly, (97%) respondents felt there is a continued need for programs and centers on community college campuses that focus solely on meeting the needs of women. According to respondents, women's centers are needed as much as ever for a variety of reasons, including the increased need for student support services. One respondent pointed to a commonly held view that "Many young women as well as administrators feel there is little need since so many women are already coming to school." However, she states, "Their needs have become greater and more multifaceted." Another respondent also mentioned that "desperate client situations" will require that these women receive support services to enable them to remain in the classroom.

There is some debate on the need for services exclusively for women. As one respondent stated, "women really have a special set of needs. The group support generated among women

only is very unique and adds an element of self-esteem building difficult to achieve in mixed gender groups". Another stated:

> On our campus, the counseling department wants some kind of merger and does not seem to understand the complexity and need for this separate service. We have so many women who want this type of program and who say it is the best thing that ever happened to them. The need is as strong or as strong as ever.

A few respondents, however, noted the need to utilize a "holistic" approach to the integration of services, specifically, services that include both men and women. In general, however, there appears to be general agreement among respondents that although some men are single parents and dislocated workers in need of services, women have more barriers to self-sufficiency because they are more likely to be the victims of violence and to have greater domestic and childcare responsibilities. As one respondent stated, "Women continue to need programs and services to help them overcome the disadvantage of being female in America."

DISCUSSION

The data provided by this survey indicates that a majority of community college women's centers are well-established, having been in existence between 15 and 25 years. However, significant changes have occurred within the last twenty-five years reflecting a responsiveness to current societal trends and

pressures. This discussion will focus on findings which document these changes including changes in the profile of participants and in the role and scope of women's centers. Other major findings will also be discussed.

This study confirmed changes in the participant profile of students served by the centers. Originally women's centers sought to recruit a reentry population of middle-class white women who had "lost touch" with their potential and needed affirmation. Centers are now serving different target populations including much larger numbers of single parents. According to figures from the National Network for Women's Employment (1994), nationally, the number of single parents has risen steadily and dramatically in the last decade. In community colleges, much of the increase in this target population is due to funds provided for single parents through the Carl Perkins Vocational and Technology Act. The funds provided by this source have enabled women's centers to provide programs and activities to allow this population access to postsecondary education opportunities. Education is a necessary prerequisite to the economic self-sufficiency of these women.

Centers are also expanding their service base to include men. While economic pressures have created a segment of men, primarily dislocated workers, who can benefit from the remedial services offered by women's centers, the special circumstances

temporary funding bases, often having to justify their existence by generating self-supporting funds. What appears to make this concern more urgent at this juncture, as voiced by survey respondents, is the current conservative political and economic climate.

Results also confirm the significant role that federal funding has played in the establishment of women's centers on community college campuses. In particular, this funding has played a large part in providing support services for special populations, including single parents and displaced homemakers, as well as funding for programs to eliminate sex bias and stereotyping. As seen in the analysis of present center budgets, federal funding is still playing a dominant role. It remains to be seen how the diminishing federal dollar will impact the survival of women's centers in the future, but there appears to be cause for concern.

Without the "strength" of this funding, community college women's centers may be in the same position as their four year college and university counterparts, who often "struggle to survive on grants, user fees or fundraising campaigns" all of which "require tremendous energy in the management of volunteer cadres" (Wetzel, 1988, p.13). This struggle diverts attention from programs and activities to a focus on survival and results in stress and burn-out among center staff.

women continue to face, including well-documented internal and external constraints, justify the continued existence for separate programs for women (Rice, 1990).

Changes in the role and scope of women's centers appear to be due to the change in the participant profile. Centers report a shift from a feminist orientation to one that emphasizes "hard" skills that aid in employability, and self-sufficiency. Other centers, however, are focusing away from these same employability issues to issues related to a focus on the general college curricula. A possible explanation is that centers are concentrating on "the basics" in an effort to address retention issues. The apparent contradiction in focus may also be explained by regional or contextual differences (such as variance in the needs and interests of the different segments of the target population). However, it may also confirm previous research which has identified the propensity for women's centers to address a wide range of populations, needs and concerns (Giraud, 1977). Some have speculated that this puts the resources of women's centers at risk by spreading the limited financial resources "so thin that all the centers' efforts are weakened" (Keller and Rogers, 1983, p.550).

The selection of funding by survey respondents as the primary challenge facing their center reflects a consistent theme in the literature. Centers still operate with inadequate and

In particular, the number of community college equity programs funded by this source will be impacted. The National Network for Women's Employment (1995), estimates the proportion of women in non-traditional careers has remained consistent at near nine percent (9%) for the past two decades and has called for a stronger focus on non-traditional careers. The pioneering efforts of community college women's centers in providing programs to encourage women to pursue non-traditional careers are needed if we are to see greater progress toward achieving equity.

The research literature is not clear on the reasons women's centers have not been successful in obtaining permanent funding bases. Mulligan (1973) has speculated that the educational needs of women "will never be a volatile and dramatic issue like drug abuse and race relations. The fabric of society is not threatened in any immediate way by a failure to respond to the needs of women for education" (p.17). For whatever reason, it is clear that institutions will now need to provide this support in lieu of federal funds if these programs are to survive.

Survey findings also provide confirmation of yet another consistent theme in the literature on women's centers, the lack of adequate data on centers. Half of the respondents did not know the size of their initial budgets and were unable to respond to questions regarding changes since program inception. This is

indicative of the lack of documentation within women's centers, which has contributed to the gap in their historical record. Rice (1990) and others have noted that "a real vacuum has existed in the systematic collection of data and statistics" (1989, p. 16).

Due to a focus on the provision of services and activities and limited funding and personnel to conduct research and assessment, these activities have often been neglected. Systematic evaluation activities are necessary in order to document successes and thereby assist in "justifying" these centers' existence. Records that "demonstrate user patterns and attest to program effectiveness" (Rice, 1979, p.17) are necessary for accountability. Rice (1979) has suggested that research strategies for continuing education programs for women should concentrate on effects research rather than content analysis (of workshops, etc.) and should include longitudinal evaluations (follow-up) on a systematic basis. Unfortunately, the question of funding for evaluation still remains at question.

Finally, survey results point out the relatively insignificant role that women's center's assign to their role as advocates of women's issues. Women's centers owe their origins to the women's movement and to countless sacrifices by many determined women who pioneered these programs. To a large degree, women's centers have survived for the past 25 years

because of the commitment and dedication of women who, "Saw them not as superfluous women's centers or as a gimmick to increase enrollment, but as a critical stepping stone to a better way of life for many women." (Brootkowski, 1989, p.22). In light of pending funding cutbacks, institutions will be forced to make choices. Women's centers must continue to advocate for the needs of women on community college campuses and to advocate to establish themselves, "Not only as the conscience of an institution but also as one of its central functions" (Buckley and Hetherington, 1988, p.30).

CONCLUSION

Current demographic trends suggest the dominance of women in American higher education (Long and Blanchard, 1991). In particular, in the community college, the numbers of non-traditional students including more female minorities, single parents and reentry women are expected to continue to rise. As the community college holds out the promise of access to these high risk populations, they will need programs and services such as those offered currently by women's centers to facilitate their great needs. Yet, it is ironic that in many ways, women's centers appear to be as much "at-risk" as the populations they serve.

Current economic and political climates present a dangerous scenario for the future operations of women's centers which have

historically been understaffed and underfunded from their inception (Wetzel, 1988; Astin, 1976). Community college women's centers in particular have relied on temporary funds, such as federal funding, for their existence and growth. There exists a very real possibility, in the wake of the reduction of federal funds, that many centers may be eliminated or significantly reduced. In particular, the impact of the loss of equity programs and programs for special populations funded by this source may be devastating, especially if institutions are unwilling or unable to continue funding this service. Given the decline in the traditional college population and enrollment trends which point to education as "the turf of female students", (Long and Blanchard, 1991, p.56) institutions must be responsive to the needs of women by committing institutional funding for the continuation of these programs.

Community college women's centers have played a vital role in the educational success of legions of women across the nation. They have much experience in meeting the unique needs of women, particularly those most often "shut out" of the educational mainstream. However, in order to ensure their continued survival in these tenuous times, they must guard against marginal and fringe positions. They are to be commended for their commitment to providing services and activities for their target

populations, but must now be more active and vocal in their advocacy roles if they are to remain in existence.

It may also be necessary for centers to evaluate and redefine their role and scope in light of target population shifts and limited resources. Programmatic needs and successes must be documented. In particular, women's center's crucial role in the retention of at risk populations must be acknowledged and brought to the forefront of administrative attention, it is a question of survival.

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